



# Position Level Benchmarks for USPSCs

A Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 309

New Edition Date: 06/15/2016  
Responsible Office: M/OAA/P  
File Name: 309mag\_061516

## **POSITION LEVEL BENCHMARKS** **FOR USPSCs AT GS-5 TO GS-15 EQUIVALENT GRADES**

### **INTRODUCTION**

To meet the requirements of [AIDAR, Appendix D](#) and [ADS 309.3.2.2](#), Requestors and Contracting Officers/Executive Officers (COs) must determine the level of U.S. Personal Services Contractor (USPSCs) positions for work both in the U.S. and overseas. The benchmark characteristics of this guide are designed to assist Requestors, and COs with determining the GS-equivalent grade and corresponding salary range for a USPSC position. The GS grade represents the market value for the work to be performed, and the GS salary range represents agreement within the U.S. Government about approximately what USAID should pay for performance of that work.

Requestors and COs must use the benchmarks here to make judgments about the appropriate GS grade salary range for a USPSC position. Generic benchmarks and characteristics are provided for positions at the GS-5 through 15 levels. If a position description includes duties or kinds of work that are not addressed in the generic benchmarks for a given grade, the position may still be set at that grade if the added work is substantively related to the general intent of the generic benchmarks and the Requestor justifies this determination (see [ADS 309.3.2.2](#)).

### **A. Salary Level Benchmarks: Grades GS-5, 9, and 13**

#### **1. GS-5**

Occupations at this level involve structured work in support of office operations. Clerical work is performed in accordance with established policies, procedures, or techniques. The work requires knowledge of an organization's rules, some degree of subject matter knowledge, and skill in carrying out the full range of clerical assignments. Positions at this level normally require at least one year of substantive general office, administrative, or clerical experience.

Clerical work typically involves general officer or program support duties, such as preparing, receiving, reviewing, and verifying documents; processing transactions; maintaining tracking systems; maintaining office records; locating and compiling data or information from files; keeping a calendar and informing others of deadlines and other important dates; and using keyboards to prepare typewritten material or to store or manipulate information for data processing use. Incumbents follow accepted practices in resolving nonrecurring problems and meeting deadlines.

Work is assigned by a supervisor, with on-the-job training provided as needed. Work is reviewed for accuracy, format, etc. and the supervisor is kept informed of work progress. Contacts at the GS-5 level are typically limited to Agency personnel to obtain and provide information of a procedural nature.

## **2. GS-9**

Positions at this level require the exercise of analytical ability, judgment, discretion, and personal responsibility, and the application of a substantial body of knowledge of principles, concepts, and practices applicable to administrative and program issues or studies. While these positions do not require specialized education, they do involve the type of skills (analytical, research, writing, judgment) typically gained through a college level education consisting of two full years at the graduate level or a Master's Degree, or through three years of progressively responsible experience equivalent to this level. This kind of work is typically a service function which supports the Agency's mission or program. Work principally involves dealing with problems and relationships of a procedural nature, rather than the substance of work operations, issues, or other subjects studied.

Incumbents typically prepare program documentation; maintain tracking systems to monitor goals and expenditures; and draft recurring reports. Incumbents are required to brief managers on study findings and recommendations. These reports and recommendations influence decisions by managers concerning the internal operations of the organization and the activities studied.

Contacts at this level are typically made to obtain or exchange factual information and to provide advice to managers on non-controversial issues and concerns. Contacts are usually limited to immediate Agency personnel and include minimal substantive contacts with the general public.

The supervisor typically assigns projects and sets deadlines for completing the work. Findings and recommendations developed by the incumbent are reviewed for appropriateness prior to release or discussion with management officials.

Knowledge of established management/program principles, pertinent regulations, and internal guidelines, plus skills in conducting fact-finding studies, are required.

## **3. GS-13**

Typical of this level are professional/technical assignments involved with project or program management, and with project development. Although not a policy maker, at this level the incumbent influences program policy by reason of recognized expertise in the particular field of development assistance.

Professional work requires knowledge in a field of science or learning acquired through education or training equivalent to the graduate or higher degree level, with significant study in or pertinent to the specialized field, as distinguished from general education, or five years of progressively responsible experience equivalent to this level in the professional or technical field. Work requires the exercise of discretion, judgment, and personal responsibility.

At this level, work typically includes planning, organizing, directing, designing, and coordinating development programs and/or projects, requiring diverse creative and support efforts contributed by others; or the work entails conducting evaluations to determine the feasibility of various advanced approaches to define concepts and criteria for future programs or to resolve major controversial problems in current programs. Typical assignments require developing detailed plans, goals, and objectives for the long range implementation and administration of the program, or developing the criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of the program.

Technical work at this level requires expertise in specialized fields. Assignments include providing technical advice in the formulation of overall country programs and strategies and in the planning, development, design, evaluation, and implementation of activities.

Incumbents typically identify and develop ways to resolve problems or cope with issues which directly affect the accomplishment of principal program goals and objectives. Incumbents may develop new ways to resolve major problems, or plan the most significant aspects of professional or scientific programs.

Incumbents may work as a team leader, guiding and coordinating the work of other professional or technical staff.

Assignments are generally received in terms of general objectives. Typically, incumbents consult with other professional or technical personnel, and user organizations, to develop the objectives in more detail and to reconcile conflicts. Technical problems are generally resolved without reference to supervisors. Recommendations of incumbents at this level are normally accepted by others as those of a specialist. Completed work is reviewed for feasibility in relation to requirements, and for conformance with overall policy and program objectives.

The work includes representing the organization in high-level conferences and meetings, explaining and interpreting policies and requirements to others, and negotiating important issues with other groups.

#### **4. Interpolating Between Grades GS 5, 9 and 13**

The Requestor and CO can determine if a position falls above or below the grade levels described above by extending the benchmarks as needed to meet specific job situations. In order to interpolate between the levels provided, the Requestor and CO must consider the following:

- The degree of responsibility for decision making assigned to the position;
- The level of resources allocated to the assignment;
- The complexity of the host government's organizational structure, and its effect on the incumbent's responsibilities;
- The level of management expertise in host-country offices;

- The stage of the activity (formative or established);
- The level of contacts outside the Agency;
- The level of work assignments (Is the assignment a portion of a larger study or activity, or an entire results package?);
- The level of supportive work in a professional or administrative field;
- The level of knowledge/experience required to perform work assigned; and/or,
- The level of supervision required over the position.

## **B. Salary Level Benchmarks: Grades GS-13, 14 and 15**

The benchmark characteristics for positions at these grade levels are provided in table form to make the differences between salary classes clearer. Differences in characteristics between GS-13, 14 and 15 levels are far less distinct than those between salary classes at lower levels. The most significant differences are outlined in the first summary table in the areas of *Responsibility for Decision Making, Knowledge Level, Scope/Effect, Contacts* and *Performance Guidelines*.

*The GS-13 characteristics/benchmarks from above are repeated in the table to help differentiate between GS-13 and GS-14 characteristics.*

### **SUMMARY OF KEY DIFFERENTIATING CHARACTERISTICS**

<b>GS-13</b>	<b>GS-14</b>	<b>GS-15</b>
<b>DECISION MAKING—</b> Performs under administrative direction with latitude for the exercise of independent judgment; exercises independent judgment in areas such as program/project management, though not a policy-maker	<b>DECISION MAKING—</b> Performs under general administrative discretion with wide latitude for the exercise of independent judgment; work of outstanding difficulty and responsibility; has formal decision making authority in broad program area	<b>DECISION MAKING—</b> Performs under administrative discretion; work of outstanding difficulty which has demonstrated leadership and exceptional attainments; typically serves as highest-level decision maker
<b>KNOWLEDGE LEVEL—</b> Mastery of an area of specialization	<b>KNOWLEDGE LEVEL—</b> Mastery of an area of specialization but assignments are complicated by interconnected issues, multi-disciplinary approaches, conflicts among possible technical solutions, etc.	<b>KNOWLEDGE LEVEL—</b> Mastery of a very broad field of expertise
<b>SCOPE/EFFECT—</b> Considered an expert; consulted by specialists/senior specialists; when position requires development of regulatory or legislative proposals, incumbent is	<b>SCOPE/EFFECT—</b> Considered an expert and consulted by other experts; assignments reflect wide program area; projects range from regional to national impact	<b>SCOPE/EFFECT—</b> Nationally known expert in broad field; resolves disputes that arise when leading experts disagree; work is <u>of national significance</u> or deals with problems that are rapidly evolving and have impact on a major department

GS-13	GS-14	GS-15
assigned a narrow program area  <i>Work may require team leader responsibilities, leading/coordinating work of other professional staff</i>	  <i>Work typically requires formal team leader responsibilities for coordinating/directing work of other professional staff</i>	(ex., Department of State) or legislation  <i>Key responsibility of work is leading/directing (directly/indirectly) a substantial number of other professional/technical staff</i>
<b>CONTACTS</b> —Senior professionals/officials	<b>CONTACTS</b> —Senior management officials	<b>CONTACTS</b> —Highest level of officials (SES/corporate executive and above), and contacts may extend to international organizations
<b>GUIDELINES</b> —Available and applicable, but stated in general terms	<b>GUIDELINES</b> —Broadly stated/non-specific; judgment/ingenuity required to interpret and develop applications/guidelines	<b>GUIDELINES</b> — N/A

#### EXPANDED DISCUSSION OF CHARACTERISTICS

GS-13	GS-14	GS-15
<b>Responsibility for Decision Making</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Performs under administrative direction, with latitude for the exercise of independent judgment, work of <i>unusual</i> difficulty and responsibility requiring extended professional, scientific, or technical research training and experience which has demonstrated leadership and <i>marked</i> attainments in professional, scientific, or technical research, practice or administration.</li> <li>Exercises independent judgment in areas such as program/project management, though not a policy-maker</li> </ul>	<b>Responsibility for Decision Making</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Performs under general administrative discretion, with wide latitude for the exercise of independent judgment, work of <i>outstanding</i> difficulty and responsibility along special technical, supervisory, or administrative lines, which has demonstrated leadership and <i>unusual</i> attainment</li> <li>Has formal decision making authority in broad program area. May serve as higher level decision maker, possibly responsible for developing policies</li> </ul> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comparable work, such as planning and executing</li> </ul>	<b>Responsibility for Decision Making</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Under general administrative direction, with wide latitude for the exercise of independent judgment, work of outstanding difficulty and responsibility along special technical, supervisory, or administrative lines, which has demonstrated leadership and exceptional attainments</li> <li>Typically serves as highest-level decision maker, responsible for approving policies with Agency-wide impact.</li> </ul> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comparable work such as planning and directing/executing specialized programs of marked difficulty,</li> </ul>

GS-13	GS-14	GS-15
	major professional, scientific, technical, administrative, fiscal or other specialized programs that demonstrates unusual attainment, with wide latitude for exercise of independent judgment and decision making	responsibility and <u>national significance</u> , along professional, scientific, technical, administrative, fiscal, or other lines, requiring extended training and experience which has demonstrated leadership and <u>exceptional attainments</u>
<b>Knowledge Level Required by the Position</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mastery of a professional or administrative field to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Apply experimental theories and new developments to problems not susceptible to accepted methods</li> <li>○ Make decisions or recommendations that significantly change important public policies or scientific programs</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Knowledge acquired through education equivalent to the graduate or higher degree level with significant study in or pertinent to the specialized field, as distinguished from general education, or five years of progressive responsible experience equivalent to this level in the professional or technical field</li> </ul>	<b>Knowledge Level Required by the Position</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same as GS-13</li> </ul>	<b>Knowledge Level Required by the Position</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mastery of a professional or administrative field to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Apply experimental theories and new developments to problems not susceptible to accepted methods</li> <li>○ Make decisions or recommendations that significantly change important public policies or scientific programs</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Knowledge acquired through education equivalent to the graduate or higher degree level with significant study in or pertinent to the specialized field, as distinguished from general education, or five years of progressive responsible experience equivalent to this level in the professional or technical field</li> <li>• Generates and develops new hypotheses and theories</li> </ul>
<b>Supervisory Controls</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervisor sets overall objectives</li> <li>• Employee and supervisor</li> </ul>	<b>Supervisory Controls</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervisor provides administrative direction in terms of broadly defined</li> </ul>	<b>Supervisory Controls</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same as GS-14</li> </ul>

<b>GS-13</b>	<b>GS-14</b>	<b>GS-15</b>
<p>together develop deadlines, projects and work to be done</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employee independently plans, designs, and carries out project, studies, and programs</li> <li>Completed work is reviewed only from an overall standpoint in terms of feasibility, compatibility with other work, or effectiveness in meeting requirements, or expected results</li> </ul>	<p>missions or functions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employee independently plans, designs and carries out project, studies, and programs</li> <li>Results of the work are considered technically authoritative</li> <li>There is no higher level official technically responsible for administering the program/project</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Guidelines</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administrative policies and precedents are applicable but are stated in general terms (i.e., Agency policy). Guidelines are scarce or of limited use</li> <li>The employee uses initiative and resourcefulness in deviating from traditional methods or in researching patterns and trends to develop new methods, criteria or proposed policies</li> </ul>	<p><b>Guidelines</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guidelines are broadly stated and non-specific (e.g., basic legislation)</li> <li>Judgment and ingenuity is required to interpret the intent of guides and to develop applications/guidelines</li> </ul>	<p><b>Guidelines</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Same as GS-14</li> </ul>
<p><b>Complexity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Duties are significantly varied and require many different unrelated processes and methods that are applied to a broad range of problems/situations that require a substantial depth of analysis</li> <li>Decisions that must be made involve major areas of uncertainty in approach, methodology, interpretation and evaluating processes</li> <li>There are continuing changes in program,</li> </ul>	<p><b>Complexity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Same as GS-13</li> </ul>	<p><b>Complexity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Duties are significantly varied and require many different unrelated processes and methods that are applied to a broad range of problems/situations that require a substantial depth of analysis</li> <li>Decisions involve largely undefined areas and issues and require extensive probing and analysis to determine the scope of the problem</li> </ul>



GS-13	GS-14	GS-15
<p>technological developments, unknown phenomena, or continuing requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The work requires originating new techniques, establishing criteria, or developing new information</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are continuing changes in program, technological developments, unknown phenomena, or conflicting requirements</li> <li>• The work requires originating new techniques, establishing criteria, or developing new information</li> <li>• Assignments are of considerable breadth and intensity and require the participation and support of others</li> <li>• The work requires a continuing effort to establish concepts, theories or programs, or to resolve unyielding problems</li> </ul>
<p><b>Scope and Effect</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work involves establishing criteria, formulating projects, assessing program effectiveness, or investigating or analyzing a variety of unusual conditions, problems or questions</li> <li>• Work product or service affects a wide range of agency activities, major activities, industrial concerns or the operations</li> <li>• Work typically includes planning, organizing, directing, designing and coordinating programs and/or projects, requiring creativity and support efforts of others; or work entails conducting evaluations to determine the feasibility of various advanced approaches to define concepts and</li> </ul>	<p><b>Scope and Effect</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The work involves isolating and defining unknown conditions, resolving critical problems, or developing new theories</li> <li>• The employee is recognized as an expert to the experts and his/her work affects the work of other experts</li> <li>• The work directly affects the development of major aspects of administrative or professional programs or Missions, or the well being of a substantial number of people</li> <li>• Work <i>typically</i> requires formal responsibilities for leading teams, guiding and coordinating the work of other professional or technical staff</li> </ul>	<p><b>Scope and Effect</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The work involves isolating and defining unknown conditions, resolving critical problems, or developing new theories</li> <li>• The employee is recognized as an expert to the experts and his/her work affects the work of other experts</li> <li>• The work directly affects the development of major aspects of administrative or professional programs or Missions, or the well being of a substantial number of people</li> <li>• The work involves planning, developing and carrying out vital programs which are essential to the mission of the Department (i.e., beyond Agency-level) or affect substantial</li> </ul>

GS-13	GS-14	GS-15
<p>criteria for future programs or to resolve major controversial problems in current programs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work <i>may</i> require working as a team leader, guiding and coordinating the work of other professions or technical staff</li> </ul>		<p>numbers of people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Key responsibility</i> of the work is to lead, direct and otherwise affect a substantial number of other professional or technical staff</li> </ul>
<p><b>Personal Contacts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contacts are with individuals or groups from inside and outside of the Agency</li> <li>• Contacts typically take place in moderately unstructured settings (i.e., not routine coordination meetings)</li> <li>• The role and authority of each party is identified and developed during the course of the contact</li> <li>• Typical contacts are those with senior level professionals, contractor representatives and representatives of professional organizations</li> <li>• Provides technical advice in the area of specialty in formulation of related higher-level programs</li> </ul>	<p><b>Personal Contacts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contacts are with individuals or groups from inside and outside of the Agency</li> <li>• Contacts typically take place in moderately unstructured settings (i.e., not routine coordination meetings)</li> <li>• The role and authority of each party is identified and developed during the course of the contact</li> <li>• Typical contacts are those with attorneys, contractor executives, representatives of professional organizations, the news media or public action groups</li> </ul>	<p><b>Personal Contacts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contacts are with high ranking officials (SES, corporate executive or above) at the national and international levels from outside the department (i.e., beyond the Agency level)</li> <li>• Officials contacted are relatively inaccessible</li> <li>• Various parties may be unclear as to the role and authority of the other parties</li> <li>• Contacts are conducted under differing ground rules</li> <li>• Contacts typically include Members of Congress, leading representatives of foreign Governments, presidents of large national &amp; international firms, nationally recognized representative of the news media, presidents of national unions, state governors, and mayors of large cities</li> </ul>
<p><b>Purpose of Contacts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To influence/motivate people or groups. The people contacted may be</li> </ul>	<p><b>Purpose of Contacts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To influence, motivate, control or direct people or groups. The people</li> </ul>	<p><b>Purpose of Contacts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To justify, defend, negotiate and settle matters involving</li> </ul>

<b>GS-13</b>	<b>GS-14</b>	<b>GS-15</b>
<p>fearful, skeptical or uncooperative</p> <p>The employee must be skillful in determining the appropriate approach in negotiating and persuading others, and in establishing rapport in order to gain and relay information.</p>	<p>contacted may be fearful, skeptical or uncooperative</p> <p>The employee must be skillful in determining the appropriate approach in negotiating and persuading others, and in establishing rapport in order to gain and relay information, including decision makers.</p>	<p>significant or controversial issues among decision makers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The work usually involves active participation in conferences, meetings, hearings or presentations involving problems or issues of considerable consequence or importance</li> </ul> <p>The people contacted typically have diverse viewpoints, goals or objectives, and therefore the employee is required to achieve a common understanding among the various parties and create a satisfactory solution that addresses their various objectives and concerns.</p>

309mag\_061516